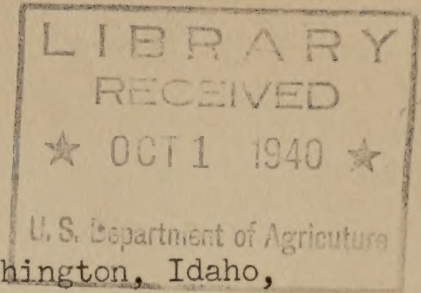


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U.S. FSA

MOBILE CAMPS FOR MIGRANT FARM FAMILIES



To the migrant families seeking work in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, California, Arizona, Texas and Florida, the months of the year mean different crops -- lettuce, cotton, peas, hops, potatoes, oranges, apples, --and a long distance to be traveled between crops.

The pattern of work in the states depending on migrant labor to harvest their crops follows a fairly reliable schedule. In Oregon, for example, about 4,000 laborers are needed at Gresham from May to August for the strawberries and raspberries. Then, the work may move on to Stayton where from July to September some 5,000 pickers are needed for beans, or to the hop fields at Independence, where there is a demand for about 10,000 workers from August to September. From there, the migrant families may travel to Merrill where 3,000 laborers gather potatoes from September to mid-November.

Because of varying market prices, or weather hazards such as a sudden freeze or drought, it is impossible to say for sure where and when an influx of migrant families can be expected. But to those migrant families who follow the well-traveled routes of work, the Farm Security Administration's permanent migratory labor camps offer clean shelters, laundry and toilet facilities, showers and a chance for normal community life -- a definite improvement over the ditch-bank camps and shack-towns usually improvised by the migrants as living quarters.

The FSA began to build these camps in 1936, primarily as a sanitation measure to meet some of the urgent health and housing problems forced on the West Coast states by the vast wave of migration from Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Missouri and other mid-west farming areas. Most of the migrants at that time had been driven off their land by

drought; in more recent years, their numbers have been swelled by the increasing use of labor-saving farm machinery, which is displacing thousands of tenants and share-croppers, who then usually take to the road in search of seasonal labor in the harvests.

Today, there are 37 permanent migratory labor camps where about 35,000 of the half million migrant families on the road can be sheltered, although only 7,500 families can be accommodated at any one time. These camps, located in areas with consistently high rates of farm employment, can serve only a limited number of migrant families, which find jobs in the general vicinity of the camps. Migrants who followed the crops to other areas, especially short-season crop areas, can not take advantage of these camps. Moreover, the permanent camps are not filled to capacity all year around. During slack seasons, some of them may be almost empty. A camp filled with 200 families for six or seven months may average as few as 40 families during the rest of the year.

To meet the special needs of the migrants' life, particularly in areas with short work seasons, a kind of traveling camp had to be worked out -- a "camp on wheels." Such a camp could give more service to more people, on a greatly reduced investment; and the same equipment could serve the migrants almost continuously throughout the year, as it moved from one short-season area to another.

Farm Security Administration engineers got busy on the idea. They finally adapted certain features of the circus to the mobile camps -- the use of tents, and the efficient organization which made it possible to dismantle the whole tent colony overnight, and move it quickly to a new location. They also picked up many ideas from the long-tested

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organization of army camps. Nineteen such mobile camps are now either in operation or under construction.

To make possible a town that can be moved overnight to follow the migrants, the Farm Security Administration is using specially-built trailers which supply power and water for the camp. The typical mobile camp houses about 200 families or 1,000 individuals and costs about \$26,000 to \$30,000, a fraction of what a permanent camp can be built for. It is estimated on the basis of experience with the first mobile camps that operating costs will come to about \$1,000 a month. Five specially-built trailers and a five ton truck to transport tent platforms make up the usual mobile camp equipment. There is no definite number of family units for any one camp. Different conditions require a smaller or larger camp, and all equipment is designed so that it can be flexibly used in different combinations.

One trailer serves as a power unit to supply hot water and light to the camp. This is equipped with a Diesel generator set, a 600 gallon fuel oil tank, a 600 gallon hot water transfer tank, and a 75-gallon-per-minute boiler. There are connections for attaching the unit to an outside source of power, thus permitting the Diesel to remain idle where public power is available. Flexible, heavily insulated electric cables connect the power trailer to lights in the camp office, clinic, shower, trailer, community center, and to the street lights.

Another trailer is equipped with a 1,200-gallon atmospheric pressure water tank, a 75-gallon-per-minute high pressure pump, an 800-gallon high pressure tank, two auxiliary air chambers, an air compressor, a switchpanel, and the necessary auxiliaries to make the unit fully auto-

matic to supply water under 25 to 40 pounds pressure throughout the camp. This unit is connected to the camp by lightweight, flexible pipe which is attached to outside faucets near the tents.

Another large trailer is piped for warm water, and has 25 partitioned showers built into the trailer -- 13 for men and 12 for women. Separate dressing room lean-to tents are attached to the opposite sides of the trailer. Galvanized iron tubs are transported by truck and placed under a tent for laundry facilities. They are equipped with wringers and connected to the hot water supply. All waste sewage is disposed of through large pipes which goes to a leaching field in accordance with local health regulations.

The camp also has a house trailer for the camp manager which is used as an office, and a clinic trailer which carries all medical equipment needed for treatment of minor wounds, infections and immunization work. The clinic is equipped with an examining chair and cabinets, and has a standard 12 by 14 foot wall tent for a reception room. A registered nurse is in attendance at all times, and local doctors are on call.

Mobile camps are set up in a particular area only after studies reveal (1) that a need exists for the camp, (2) the approximate season during which the camp would be effective and (3) the estimated occupancy of the camp. Land is leased for the camp whenever possible, which is in grass or has a cover crop to keep down dust, and which is near a city or county water supply, but is outside the city limits. At least 20 acres of land are required as a site for each camp, but the ideal size is about 40 acres. Leases on the land are acquired for a five-year period. The rent, which runs from \$150 to \$250, a year usually is paid

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through contributions from farmers, merchants and other local groups sponsoring the camps.

When the mobile camp arrives, an empty field can be transformed almost overnight into an orderly, neat, little town. Rows of tents face sprinkled dirt streets regulated by one-way traffic and a speed limit. Back of the tents are sanitary privies and garbage pits, properly covered* and chemically treated. A community tent where church services and entertainments are held is near the center of the camp. There also is a laundry tent where the women in the camp can use galvanized wash tubs equipped with wringers and having hot and cold water. Irons heated by coal or wood stoves can be taken to their tents for pressing clothes. The partitioned showers are used continuously.

Camp residents are typical of migrant families on the road. Of six families interviewed at the Yakima camp a few months ago, for example, three had been "dusted out" of farms in Oklahoma or Kansas. Henry J. Lockard, another camper, used to own a farm in Idaho, but poor crops and low prices took it away. Before coming to the camp, he and his wife lived in the back of a small pick-up truck with no top. Half of the six families had cars, nine years or more old. During the last year, their average earnings were \$200 per family, or about 60 cents a day.

Although a camp manager, a clerk, a nurse and a repair-man staff the typical mobile camp, a council elected by the campers from among the residents makes up the rules for the camp, democratically runs the community business, and administers a camp fund. This fund, made up from voluntary contributions -- in some camps, 25 cents a week, in others 10 cents a day -- is used to provide food and clothing for destitute

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families in the camp, milk for pre-school children, and sometimes to buy equipment for the use of all. To the Government, the campers contribute 2 hours of labor on camp upkeep weekly. Included in this work is the setting-up and dismantling of the camp.

Education and recreational activities are not neglected. In some camps, Work Projects Administration teachers give classes. At one mobile camp where 300 small children were left all day while their parents worked in the beans, a nursery school arrangement was made with Work Projects Administration playground supervisors. Most of the mobile camps, through the cooperation of the WPA, now have nursery schools providing hot lunches for the children of the migrants.

The first mobile camps to be put in operation have become very popular with the local growers, the Chambers of Commerce, the State Employment Services, Farm Bureaus and other similar groups. For instance, at Calipatria, California, the sponsoring group in the community recently donated a \$600 water tank and storage tower for the camp water supply.

A letter from the Service Club of Merrill, Oregon, where the first mobile camp opened in October, 1939, gives an explanation for this popularity:

"The camp has done a lot of good, benefiting the farmers, the town, county and transient seasonal workers. Farmers have been able to secure good men when needed..... There was during the past season a marked decrease in the number of complaints filed in the local courts, and this decrease, we believe to be partly due to establishment of this camp. The seasonal workers have had a place to go, instead of being forced to camp in vacant lots and streets; they have had a place to clean up and live like human beings instead of animals. Result is marked improvement of morale, efficiency and health of workmen, reduction of crime and better relations

between employer and employee...."

The camp manager of a mobile camp in California recently reported:

"Due to the fact that the camp had moved into a new area, the local community was not quite sure just how to accept the campers at first. The local police chief told the manager to be sure and see that the campers did not loiter on the street corners or go up town on Saturday night, but later, a town committee visited the camp during one of the weekly open council meetings and extended the camp a cordial welcome to its city."

No definite conclusions can yet be drawn about the effectiveness of the mobile units, as they have only been operating a comparatively short time. Although they are still in the experimental stage, certain advantages already are obvious. The mobile camp costs a great deal less than a standard camp, even considering the cost of moving from one site to another. The shortness of crop seasons in some areas, which make permanent camp inadvisable, is no disadvantage to the mobile units. Mobile camps are also more adaptable to meet sudden peak labor demands. They have already been used in conjunction with some of the standard camps, to accomodate for an over-flow of workers for a brief period. The use of these camps also fits in more closely with the Farm Placement Service's calls for workers. In the Pacific Northwest, for example, migrants residing in the mobile camps register with this Service, and as a result obtain more continuous work.

An adaptation of the mobile camp idea is now being considered for use in areas with very short crop seasons along the Eastern seaboard from Florida to New York. Because of the cost of moving all equipment, a plan is being discussed to build permanent community centers and clinics at some sites, and have these buildings opened when the mobile camp arrives.

In this way, the initial investment would still be far less than that required in the standard camps, and the cost of moving heavy tent platforms and other supplies could be seriously cut. Plans for such camps, however, are still tentative and are dependent on further experience with the mobile units now in operation.

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